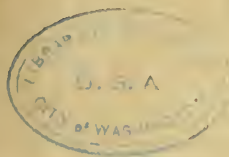


Kansas—The Lecompton Constitution.



SPEECH

OF

HON. JAMES BUFFINTON, OF MASS.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, March 24th, 1858.

Mr. Chairman, a little less than two years ago, I had the honor to address the House of Representatives upon the application of the people of Kansas to be admitted into the Union with a constitution which they had formed for themselves. That constitution was unexceptionable in its character and general provisions. It embodied the will of a large majority of the people; and, had it been accepted by Congress, and had Kansas been admitted as a State, the then existing difficulties would have been settled, and the subsequent scenes and events which form the blackest stain upon our national reputation would have been prevented. I advocated, sincerely and earnestly, the admission, as an act of justice to the people who asked respectfully and in a proper manner to be permitted to join the Union, and also as a wise, just, and politic means of removing this exciting and dangerous question from the national councils. The administration party then in power opposed the admission successfully; and during the time that has since elapsed, Kansas has been the theatre of crime and disorder unparalleled in our history.

The arm of the Federal Government, which should have have shielded and protected the people in the enjoyment of their rights, has sustained the invasion of those rights, and has sustained the minority in establishing its supremacy over the majority, until the executive power, instead of being respected and loved as a protector and friend, is slighted and detested as an enemy and an oppressor. Since the first session of the last Congress an entire revolution has taken place. Now there is an application that Kansas shall be admitted as a State; but under how different circumstances! Instead of a constitution embodying the will of the people, one is offered to which five-sixths of the people have expressed their opposition. Instead of institutions which the people have chosen and prefer, there are provisions in the organic law which they loathe and detest.

And this constitution, framed by a minority of a convention authorized by a Legislature chosen by a minority of the people, and adopted by a minority of one-sixth of the legal voters, is attempted to be forced upon an unwilling people by the Administration and its friends. The reasons which led me to favor the adoption of the constitution presented to Congress two years ago, compel me to oppose the acceptance of that which is now presented to us. And I propose to submit, as briefly as possible, the considerations which influence my opposition to it.

The debate upon this question has taken so wide a range, that almost all the issues between the two sections of the country have been discussed, and the extreme views on both sides have been presented to the House. I think that some of these do not necessarily present themselves. The question has enough of the elements of discord in itself, and I regret that topics that do not necessarily appertain to it should have been introduced. In the conclusions which I have formed upon the subjects now legitimately before us, I have not found it necessary to consider whether slavery is or is not a just, moral and humane institution. It is not merely because slavery would be established in Kansas by the Lecompton constitution, that I oppose its admission as a State. There are a sufficient number of other objections which compel me to oppose it; objections which arise in the incipient steps which were taken to organize a government of the Territory, and which increase in number and force from the first invasion of the Missourians to overpower the actual residents, down to the present time. Had a constitution recognizing and authorizing slavery been legally adopted by the people, and had they clearly and unequivocally offered such a constitution, endorsed by a majority, and demanded admission under it, the question whether slavery would be a sufficient objection to the admission of a State would be fairly before us. Should a State ever ask to be

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admitted into the Union with a pro-slavery constitution while I am a member of Congress, I shall then feel obliged to determine whether or not the pro-slavery provisions would be a sufficient objection to the admission to require me to vote against it.

While I say that there are enough other considerations besides that of slavery which require me to oppose the imposition of the Lecompton constitution upon the people of Kansas, it is not because I wish to avoid a discussion of that question of slavery which has produced at different times so great excitement in the country; and which is now convulsing the people and attracting the eyes of the whole civilized world upon us, watching to see if our institutions can stand firm against these violent political shocks. Could the men who framed our Federal constitution have foreseen the extent of the danger which then lay hidden under this question, they undoubtedly would have provided for its settlement, either by giving Congress the power, clearly and unequivocally, to control the establishment of slavery in the Territories, or, what is perhaps more probable considering the prevailing dissatisfaction with, and hostility to, the institution existing both North and South at that time, Congress itself would have prohibited forever its extension in all Territories, as it did in the Northwestern Territory. No human foresight could then have apprehended that slavery, which Virginia and North Carolina, equally with Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, denounced as a great evil, the gradual and entire abolition of which had, as was supposed, been secured by its prohibition in the Northwestern Territory, and the prohibition of the importation of slaves after the year 1808, could have grown into such importance, and so absorbed all other questions as to threaten the continuance of the Union, which was then being consolidated. The causes which have made the slaveholding interest one of such magnitude, so dearly cherished by the South, did not exist at the time of the formation of the constitution.

The subsequent discovery and development of the immense agricultural resources of the South, unknown at that time, offered the opportunity of rapidly accumulating great wealth by the employment of slave labor in the cotton fields, and cupidity and avarice at once operated, to convert what till then had been thought an evil and a curse, into a blessing, from which all moral and political good flowed. While the sentiment of the South underwent this change, perhaps naturally enough, considering the infirmities of human nature, the North became more confident in its hostility to slavery, and this speck upon the dawn of our prosperity soon enlarged and became a black lowering cloud, bearing a tempest in its bosom, threatening to overwhelm and destroy the fabric which was yet scarcely established upon its foundations. Timid apprehensions of the consequences, or still baser influences, have at different times operated upon a portion of the North sufficiently to avoid and delay a definitive settlement of the question. Concession of Northern rights and principles, falsely called compromises, have been yielded to the clamorous demands of the South, until the natural result has ensued of an

attempt at absolute domination, regardless of even the forms of justice or fair proceeding. Had the North been unanimous in its opposition to the so-called Missouri compromise act, had there been no traitors to the sentiment and interests of their constituents, it is my belief that our history would not have furnished the subsequent instances of violent sectional strife which now tarnish its pages. The question would never again have assumed sufficient importance to have produced serious agitation. The North then conceded all that the South asked, and received in return some promises, to be fulfilled in a distant future, for which fulfillment there were no guarantees, except the good faith and honor of the South.

Now, when the first occasion arises to test the good faith of the South, how is it kept? The Missouri compromise, unjust as it was, had been universally acquiesced in for thirty-one years; the agitation on the slavery question had almost entirely subsided, and the most friendly relations and feelings existed between the different sections, when the South, with a few Northern co operators, by organizing a Territorial government when none was there needed, and where, if there had been, there was no demand for any unusual provisions in its organization, wantonly threw a firebrand to reillumine the flames of civil dissension and revive the sectional bitterness which always attends the agitation of the slavery question. The solemn engagements of the South were disregarded. The faith which they had pledged, and for which they had received a consideration, was broken. Their honor, which they profess to regard so highly, and which had been pledged that if we would let them have Missouri, they would ask for nothing more north of the line of thirty-six degrees thirty minutes, was violated. We ought not now to be surprised that the consummation of the act is attempted by the most odious frauds. In the repeal of the Missouri compromise were the "seeds and roots of iniquity and shame." From this egg was hatched all those subsequent atrocities which have culminated in an attempt to enforce upon Kansas a tyranny as monstrous as any ever attempted by a despotic government.

The North pronounced its judgment upon this first act in the series, by consigning those of their Representatives who had so basely betrayed them, to a political grave. But specious arguments and delusive pretences were not wanting to appease the indignation which was aroused. Squatter sovereignty, the right of the people to regulate their own domestic institutions, tickled the ears and deluded the judgment of honest men at the North. Assurances were loudly proclaimed and often repeated throughout all the free States, from the Penobscot to "Lower Egypt," that if the candidate of the Democratic party should be elected, the whole influence of the Administration would be used to secure to the people of Kansas, the rights guaranteed to them by the Nebraska act. The votes of thousands of honest Democrats were obtained by these falsehoods, who would have seen their hands wither before they would have deposited a ballot for this Administration, could they have foreseen that it would go beyond its predecessor in its base prostration before the shrine of slavery.

The pro-slavery party, having just broken their faith and violated their solemn pledges, by the repeal of the Missouri compromise, now offered new pledges; and to relieve, if possible, the odium which always attaches to an act of perfidy, proposed a substitute, and plighted the public faith by an act of Congress, assuring the people in terms as clear as language can make them, that the inhabitants of the Territories shall be left "to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way." And here begins the series of acts always attended by fraud or violence; the direct result of which, if Congress accepts the Leecompton constitution, will be to deprive the people of Kansas, of the rights in the exercise of which the Federal Government had solemnly assured them they should be protected.

Contrary to expectation, however, the preconceived plan of making Kansas a slave State was not to be accomplished without a struggle. Emigrant aid societies were formed, and an "organized emigration" poured into the Territory a population who had the courage, the energy, and the will, to contend with firmness and patience, by all lawful means, against a desperate party which, sustained by the whole influence and power of the Federal Government, was striving to wrest the Territory from freedom. The projectors of the scheme to make Kansas a slave State were sorely troubled by the success of this emigration, and, in the bitterness of their rage, heaped opprobrious epithets upon the emigrants—the late Executive of the United States even descending to denounce them in special a message. They were called factious, impudent intruders into a place where they did not belong, and where they went only for a special purpose, which interfered gravely with the projects of certain political schemers. Sir, what business was it of the President, or is it of you, or mine, or any one else, for what purpose they went there, as long as that purpose was lawful? They were a people whose education and whose moral and physical condition reflected credit on the country from which they emigrated, and gave assurance of as useful, law-loving, and law-abiding population, as ever formed a new State. If they made any sacrifices in leaving homes abounding with all the comforts of civilization, to make their abode in a wilderness, for the sake of accomplishing what they believed to be a great and good result, all honor to them for their devotion to freedom, and for their readiness to encounter hardships and dangers for the establishment of their principles, and the principles of their revolutionary ancestors, in a new State. They went to the Territory with their families and household goods, intending to remain there, to establish their homes there, to build up villages, and erect churches and school-houses and mills, and rear up their children to be good and useful citizens. No new Territory has received a better class of emigrants, many of whom are far superior in moral worth and intellectual cultivation to those who have denounced them.

This population formed a part of the census of 1855; and the election of March 30th, of that year, having been ordered, the pro-slavery party found that something must be done to defeat the decided majority which clearly existed against them. Less

than one year previous, the public faith had been pledged that the people of the Territory should govern themselves as they saw fit; but the astute and unscrupulous managers of the pro-slavery party took the liberty, under the unexpected state of things which had arisen, of making practically an informal and somewhat illegal amendment to the act, so that in effect, instead of the people of Kansas, it was the people of Missouri, who should be left to form and regulate the domestic institutions of Kansas in their own way. During the few days preceding the election, the roads leading from the Missouri border into Kansas, were filled with armed men, without women or children; with no furniture, except that of the camp; everything indicating an invasion, and not an immigration. The districts where they voted, were dotted with their camp-fires, and "night was made hideous by their revels."

The few days succeeding the election, the roads were again filled by these men, with their backs turned on Kansas, making their way home, to relate to their families the incidents of their little jaunt over the border. Can there be any doubt what was the duty of the government officials at that election? Unquestionably they should have so ordered it that the *bona fide* inhabitants should have voted, and those alone. If their arrangements to secure this were defeated by the irruption into certain districts of an overwhelming armed force, against which they had not the means to contend, they should have so reported it, and have never consented to make returns, for there were no legal returns to be made, until a fair election had been held by actual residents, who alone had the exclusive right to make an election.

But it was not the power, it was the will to do justice and carry out the pledges which Congress had given, that was wanting. Kansas must be made a slave State at all hazards. That had been determined upon. But as the people would not do it, if, as had been promised them, they should be left perfectly free to form their own laws, the unscrupulous official agents and instruments of the slave power returned the Legislature elected by the Missourians, and these representatives of a foreign people thus fraudulently returned, immediately proceeded to perform the work which they had been chosen to execute.

The free-State people were to be oppressed, intimidated, and, if possible, crushed out and expelled; and this was attempted by robbery, arson, and murder in the country, and by tyrannical and intolerable laws in the Legislature.

The houses of the free-State inhabitants were burned, their crops were destroyed; they were subjected to the most cruel persecutions, and when they sought redress in the courts, they could procure scarcely a show of an effort to punish or arrest the ruffians. This is no exaggerated picture; it is well attested by men entitled to credit, and who came home to the communities where they were well known, to relate it. The Legislature passed laws which no one dare defend in a free, civilized community. The right of free speech, the freedom of the press, the rights of conscience were destroyed. There cannot be found to-day, in the records of any government, however arbitrary and tyrannical, laws so infamous, so dis-

graceful to the enacting power, as those enacted by this foreign Legislature, established by an armed invasion, over a people who are derisively told that they may form and regulate their institutions in their own way.

The pro-slavery party, however, had mistaken their men. The people of Kansas were not of that material which could be cowed by intimidation, or crushed by persecution, sustained though it was by Federal dragoons. Accustomed to obey the laws of a real government, they disdained and disregarded the enactments of a usurpation. They held a convention, chosen by a majority of the people, and framed a constitution, adopted by the same majority of the people, and formed a State government, and for this they have been declared rebels, guilty of treason. Where was the rebellion, and what acts constituted it? There was no insurrection against the legal authorities; there was no resistance to the enforcement of legal enactments; there was never an attempt to put the Topeka government in operation against the laws or officers of the United States. There was simply an organization which Congress was respectfully petitioned to recognize; and it was never contemplated by any body of men, as far as I know, that it should go into operation without such recognition. The whole proceeding, from beginning to end, was entirely legal and proper, and in accordance with precedents established in the formation of other States.

The troops of the United States compelled an obedience to laws which the people did not believe to have any validity, because they were not permitted to have any voice in the enactment of them, and because they were the tyrannical and oppressive enactments of a usurpation. They would not have obeyed them if they had not been compelled to; but they have made no armed resistance to their enforcement. It is an every-day occurrence in all the States for the officers to be obliged to enforce some law or other; yet I never heard that those who were so compelled to a reluctant obedience were called rebels or considered such. Had the inhabitants resisted with arms the enforcement of the acts passed by the usurpers, there are many who would have applauded them, and had the people called for aid, undoubtedly they would have had it, and matters would have been precipitated. But they took the wiser and more prudent course, and deserved great praise and honor for their temperance and patience. They resolved to trust to the justice of their cause. They would "test the truth of God against fraud of man." They relied upon the justice of their countrymen, who, they believed, perhaps too confidently, would indignantly hurl the usurpers from their places, as soon as they learned the true history of their crimes. The party who sustain the oppressors would have been very glad if the free-State people had resisted ever so little, so that it had been enough to afford a slight foundation for the charges of factious and rebellious conduct which are repeated with as much persistence as if they had been true. But the free-State men heroically endured the sufferings and persecutions to which they were subjected, rather than involve themselves and their friends in a direct opposition to the United States Government, with the immense

possible consequences. There would be time enough for that when there was no hope of relief or redress in any other way.

But this majority, so patient and cautious to keep within the strict pale of the law, continued to increase in numbers and grow stronger in their resolution. The foreign force, which had established a nominally legal authority over them by armed violence, must now devise some new mode of oppression to prevent this continued accretion to the strength of the majority. They determined to expel, if possible, some of its members, and to render it impossible to those who remained to exercise the rights guaranteed to every citizen of the United States, and especially promised to the people of Kansas by the Kansas-Nebraska act. Laws were passed such as are not uncommon in countries subject to a despotic Government; for there the rulers make no pretence of deference to the will of the people; but here, under our Government, whose fundamental principle is that the people shall have perfect freedom of speech and conscience and of action, we have, for the first time, an instance where the people are deprived of all of them. There is an attempt made to establish, by violence, or fraud, or any iniquity which may be necessary to accomplish the purpose, the relation of slavery among a people, a great majority of whom detest it; a great majority of the people of the whole country sympathizing with them in their abhorrence of it. They oppose it because they believe it an institution nefarious in itself, and pernicious in its influence. It is a curse upon any State where it exists; it affects all the relations of a community, internal and external; it is a blight upon moral and social progress; it affects all the material interests; it depresses the value of lands, it discourages and debases free labor; and gives the political control and social predominance to a few aristocratic proprietors of slaves; it retards and prevents the development of all the resources of a State, and is a withering blight upon its prosperity.

The free-State people of Kansas resist this scourge, which would afflict and injure them, and would be a curse upon their posterity. Yet by those laws, which are upheld by the pro-slavery party, they are forbidden to write, speak, or circulate in any way, the expression of their hostility to this great wrong; and the National Administration emulates the oppression of foreign despotism, in its efforts to sustain, by the employment of United States troops, the enforcement of this tyranny.

The people were also required to take an oath to support the organic act of the Territory, and the fugitive slave law. Who ever heard before of a people being required to swear that they would support a statute? If it is proper to require an oath to support one legislative enactment, why not another? why not the tariff, why not the sub-Treasury, why not any act, good, bad, or indifferent, insignificant or impotent, which Congress or a Legislature, in its wisdom or its folly, may have passed? Officers are required to swear fidelity to a constitution because that is the source of all law. It is an embodiment of the sovereignty of the people, to which they owe their allegiance; and if it was not sustained and enforced, there would be

anarchy an entire absence of authority for any law. But the requirement of an oath by the citizen to sustain any law, is a requirement to give up one of his dearest privileges, which is to oppose any law as far as he can do so legally. The law may be unconstitutional, and he may think it his duty, as a good citizen, to resist its enforcement. And where, as in Kansas, the people are required to sustain a law which many of them do believe unconstitutional, and which is repugnant to their consciences and their sense of right, before they can vote, it is a wanton act of injustice, calculated and designed, not to protect the law, but to oppress the citizen, and deprive him of his right, by requiring him to do what, if he is an honest man, it is morally impossible for him to do. These two sections, eleven and twelve, of the law should be preserved and go down in history as examples of the extremes to which the passions and the rage for power will carry men. The law accomplished its intended purpose and sustained as it was by armed numbers, from a neighboring State effectually prevented the attendance of the free-State voters at the polls, at the election in October, 1856, and another House of Representatives was chosen by a foreign people "to form and regulate the institutions of Kansas in their own way."

By this Legislature was called the convention to frame a State constitution. The facts and incidents attending the choice and action of that convention have been so often repeated of late that I shall not recite the details. The people had the most solemn and earnest assurances from the Federal officers, the faith of the Executive being pledged thereto, that the constitution should be submitted to the popular vote; and strange to say, considering the number of pledges to them which had not been kept, they once more trusted to the honor of their opponents. It is due to the Governor and his Secretary to say that they did all they could to keep their word, and for so doing, one was compelled to resign, and the other was removed by the Executive. The convention framed a pro-slavery constitution. As if in mockery, they offered it to the people, with the power to vote upon the slavery clause alone, while, if every vote in the Territory had been for the "constitution with no slavery," slavery would have been continued and established there by that constitution. Here were a people who believed that the question of the establishment of slavery was of greater importance than any other in the formation of their State Government. It was one which would have immense influence upon their present and future prosperity. The value of their property, and their means of increasing it, would be seriously affected by it, yet they were not permitted to decide that question.

It is asserted that this, the only question of great importance to the people of Kansas, was submitted to their vote. There are many men upon this floor, who support the acceptance of this constitution, who I was unwilling to believe would consent to countenance and sustain so great and palpable an injustice as this is. The right to interfere with the property of slaves in the Territory is expressly exempted. They, and, of course, their increase, must remain and continue slaves. The vote, "constitution with no slavery," could

not affect them. Now, I ask any man of candor and fairness to show me how he can maintain that the question of slavery was fairly submitted to the people. Suppose that all the people had been willing to vote upon the acceptance of the constitution; I ask in what manner any means had been provided by the convention, or by the Legislature, by which the people could have rejected slavery? The vote for the Legislature, in October, 1857, showed clearly that a large majority of the people were opposed to slavery. The convention resolved to impose slavery upon them, against their expressed will; and the Administration now ask us to sustain and confirm this imposition. To make assurance doubly sure, the absolute control of the election and the returns was given to the president of the convention; he appointed the commissioners who appointed the judges of the elections, and the votes were to be returned to him; he was entirely irresponsible; he could create or destroy votes with perfect impunity. It is stated, by men competent and having the means to judge rightly, that there are not more than twenty-five hundred pro-slavery voters in the Territory. One of the Government officials who was here, in frequent communication with the Government, some three weeks before the vote on the constitution was to be taken, asserted that there would be about six thousand pro-slavery votes for the constitution. He returned to Kansas, and about six thousand votes were returned for the constitution.

The constitution had been framed and adopted by a minority of all the members of the convention. The people of Kansas have voted upon it; and, admitting all the votes to have been cast which were returned, there is a clear majority of five thousand against the constitution. And now it is before us, the product of a singular series of minorities. It is adopted by a small minority of the people, and framed by the minority of a convention chosen by a minority of the people, and appointed by a Legislature itself elected by a minority. And this is done in the name of popular sovereignty! This is leaving the people perfectly free to form and regulate their own institutions in their own way; and to carry out this new democratic system of the party which calls itself, *par excellence*, the Democratic party!

The first act, after this scheme comes before us, is to give the control of a committee, which the majority of the House voted to raise to investigate the facts, to the minority who opposed such investigation, so that this House cannot carry out their wishes in what relates to this project of forcing slavery upon Kansas. This has the merit of consistency, at least; and I do not know but what, if we reject the Leecompton constitution, there will still be found some means to annul our action, so that the voice of Congress will have as little effect against the will of the South, operating through its instrument, the Administration, as the voice of the people of Kansas, has had against the violence of border ruffians, sustained by Government officials and Government troops. I have not given the authorities for the facts which I have stated, because they have been before us, and the public know them well, and I did not wish to occupy the time of the House more than was necessary to give the

reasons which govern my vote on this question. The facts are sustained by the report of the Kansas investigating committee of the last Congress, by the statements of the Government officials, the evidence taken by the Kansas Legislature, and the statements of individuals worthy of credit. They are sustained beyond all dispute, and are, for the most part, uncontradicted. Can there be a stronger argument than the recital of them? They show that there has been fraud, violence, or crime, at every stage of the proceedings which result in the presentation of this constitution for our acceptance. Must we use argument to convince men that they should oppose crime? Must we reason with them to persuade them to condemn the wrong and uphold the right?

Those who sustain this constitution must show that an armed invasion did not prevent a large portion of the people from coming to the polls. They must show that laws were not passed which unjustly required their submission to conditions which an honest man could not submit to, before they could vote. They must show that the people have had a fair opportunity to express their wishes regarding this constitution; or, if they cannot show that, these charges, which now stand upon uncontroverted evidence, are untrue. In advocating the acceptance of this constitution, they must give their support to the crimes which have attended its progress:

"They see the right, and they approve it too;
They know the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue."

The Governors who have been sent to Kansas to enforce the policy of the Administration in compelling submission to the yoke, have returned disgusted with the duties imposed upon them. Once removed from the baneful influence of immediate contact with the Administration, which, like the "deadly upas," seems to poison all who seek shelter under it, they see the iniquity of the scheme, and the enormity of the wrong by which it is attempted to enforce it. They depart for their post resolved to carry out the views of the Executive, believing, as many here believe, or profess to believe, that the free-State men are factious, rebellious fanatics, who have selected Kansas as the theatre of their turbulence, for no other purpose than to effect party political objects. They find them peaceful, well-disposed citizens, who have gone into the Territory intending to make their homes there, practising the mechanical arts, pursuing agriculture, and forming all the machinery of a republican community, only asking that they may be permitted to do so themselves, without the interference of another people, and the intimidation of the Federal troops. Five Governors have gone there; their sympathies and their prejudices, if they had any, wholly with those who support this constitution; their private and political interests being to carry out the slavery policy, sure of the support of the Executive and of the South, in any measure they might adopt to crush out the free-soil sentiment in the Territory. In every instance, possibly with one neutral exception, the scales have fallen from their eyes after a short residence among the people of Kansas.

Actual observation, the evidence of their own senses, converted them; and their testimony in

favor of the free-State men and their cause is overwhelming.

The Executive sends out the Governors to afflict the people of Kansas, as we read in Scripture, Balak sent Balaam to curse Israel—"Come, curse me Jacob, and come defy Israel." But Balaam found that it was the will of God that the people should be blessed. He answers, "And he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob; neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." And Balak angrily says, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore, now, flee thou to thy place. I thought to promote thee unto great honor; but lo! the Lord hath kept thee back from honor." In the same manner our Democratic Balak angrily rebukes the Governors of Kansas, because they obey the manifest will of the people, instead of his own. He removes them from office, and withholds all intended promotion and reward. I ask those gentlemen who say that the statements favorable to the free-State cause are misrepresentations, and that the arguments against the pro-slavery cause are the result of sectional animosity, to consider the fact, which I think is entitled to have great weight with you, that men taken from among you, believing as you do, and acting with you, who have been on the ground, and have seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, with the very best opportunities of confirming their belief, have renounced the opinions which they had upheld, and tell you that they were deceived. They tell you that this Lecompton constitution is a monstrous iniquity; and that if you persist in forcing it upon the people, you commit an act of oppression upon an unoffending population. Has this opinion of your comrades, your former co-operators, no weight with you? Does it not compel the reflection that it is you who may be blinded by sectional prejudice, and actuated by partisan political influences?

The consequences of the acceptance or rejection of this constitution have been introduced into this discussion. We hear one day that the pro-slavery ticket has been elected, and the next day that the free State ticket has been elected. The president of the convention maintains an oracular silence regarding the result of the election. I condemn his silence, which I cannot believe is maintained with an honest purpose; but the result of that election will not affect my vote. Were every officer on the free-State ticket elected, executive, judicial, and legislative, I should oppose the acceptance of the constitution while it appears that the people have had nothing to do with its presentation to us, and a majority of them are opposed to it. The people say that they will resist with arms any attempt to force this constitution upon them. I think it more than probable that they will do so. I should justify and applaud such a course, as I do the resistance of our ancestors to the illegal and oppressive impositions of the mother country. I should deplore the occasion of the revolution as I should the consequences likely to follow it; but my belief and apprehensions do not influence me to vote for the rejection of the constitution. I believe that on a question which involves a principle it is better to vote for the right, according

to one's best knowledge and judgment, and leave the consequences to God.

It is said, that if the constitution is rejected there will be attempts to secede made by some of the southern States. I do not believe it. I have no doubt that there are men who would gladly see such an attempt, and who have labored and intrigued to bring it about. But the people will not sustain them, and their traitorous efforts would be as abortive as those of Catiline. But if I am mistaken, and serious attempts to secede shall be made—if any men are resolved to try to break up the Union for this cause, I say, let them try it. We have listened with patience to these threats of disunion for a long time. They may or may not have had their intended effect; but the South has always obtained what it demanded. It was the intention of those who formed our Government, to restrict slavery to its then existing limits.

Had the North been true to itself at the time of the Missouri compromise, and firmly maintained that slavery and slave representation should never be extended into free territory, the question would have been settled forever. The South carried their point then, they carried it in the admission of Texas, and in the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, always growing more exorbitant in their demands, and more violent in insisting upon them, until now they claim everything. The Executive is wholly theirs. The Supreme Court have degraded the bench to the purposes of the political stump, and from their tribunal have uttered political harangues upon a subject which

they had but just before declared was not before them for judicial action. The South are exulting in the expectation that the North will continue to yield until the toleration of slavery, more or less temporary, shall be compelled in all the States of the Union. Unquestionably a large majority of the people are opposed to the further extension of slavery, and it is full time to try whether our Constitution, which is called the greatest example of popular government that has ever existed, has sufficient strength to carry out the principle that the majority shall govern.

This question has been suffered to agitate the country for nearly forty years. It is now before us in the most odious form it has ever assumed. Heretofore we have been required only to permit slavery to remain where it had existed for a long time, and where the people wished to retain it. Now we are asked to assist you to establish it where seven-eighths of the people hate and detest it. To force this upon us is tyranny as manifest and as oppressive as any that was ever exercised. It is worse than the threatened overthrow of the Constitution, for it is a violation of the great principle on which the Constitution is founded. If men will strike this blow at the foundation of our Republic, can they expect that the superstructure will long stand? I oppose the adoption of this Lecompton constitution now and always, let the consequences be what they may. Conscious that I am right, I leave the result to that Providence which has protected and favored us so long.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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